

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1) A dispenser for dispensing individual folded webs from a stack thereof, each of the webs having a common fold length, the dispenser comprising:

a start button for use by a user of the dispenser to initiate a dispensing operation;

a stack feed mechanism operable to maintain an uppermost web in the stack thereof at a selected height; and

a pick-and-place portion comprising:

a reciprocable carrier for engaging the uppermost web, lifting the uppermost web from the stack thereof, and conveying the lifted web from the stack to a location immediately above a delivery position, the carrier comprising a vacuum pickup head vertically spaced apart from a fixed portion of the pick-and-place portion of the dispenser by more than the common fold length, whereby an unfolded web carried by carrier does not touch the fixed portion; and

an electric motor for reciprocating the carrier exactly once when the start button is actuated by the user.

2) The dispenser of Claim 1 wherein the vacuum head is pivotally connected to at least one swing arm.

3) The dispenser of Claim 1 further comprising a vacuum source adjacent to and arranged for motion with the vacuum pickup head.

- 4) The dispenser of Claim 1 further comprising a stop switch for disconnecting the motor from a power source, the stop switch actuated by one of the crank and the at least one swing arm once during each rotation of the crank.
- 5) The dispenser of Claim 1 wherein the motor is drivingly connected to a crank coupled to at least one swing arm that is pivotally connected to the carrier.
- 6) The dispenser of Claim 1 further comprising a smooth cover extending between the stack and the position above the delivery point, the cover for preventing a conveyed web from contacting the fixed portion of the pick-and-place portion of the dispenser.
- 7) A method of dispensing a napkin to a user thereof, the method comprising the steps of:
- a) providing a start button for use by the user to request a napkin;
 - b) turning on an electric motor responsive to an input from the start button, the electric motor acting to move a pickup head from a pickup position above a stack of the napkins to a position above a delivery point;
 - c) conveying, at a selected rate, an uppermost napkin from the stack thereof, by means of the pickup head, to the position above the delivery point ;
 - d) stopping the motion of the pickup head at the position above the delivery point; and
 - e) causing the conveyed napkin to fall to the delivery point under the influence of gravity.
- 8) The method of Claim 7 wherein the step of stopping the motion of the pickup head comprises tripping, by means of a mechanism interposed between the motor and the pickup head, a shutoff switch when the pickup head is at the position above the delivery point.
- 9) The method of Claim 7 further comprising additional napkin-feeding steps, carried out independently of steps b) through f) of :measuring the height of the uppermost napkin in the stack

thereof by means of a position sensor and, if the height is less than a selected height, operating a second electric motor to raise a lift platform disposed beneath the stack of napkins until the uppermost napkin attains the selected height and thereafter shutting off the second electric motor.

10). The method of Claim 7 wherein the pickup head comprises a vacuum pick up head having an electrically powered vacuum source operatively associated therewith and the step of causing the napkin to fall to the delivery point comprises turning off the vacuum source.

11) The method of Claim 7 further comprising a step of repeating steps b) through e) each time the user uses the start button whereby a plurality of napkins are dispensed to the user at a delivery rate determined by the selected rate at which each napkin is conveyed.